

# Lanzmann's "Shoah" Witness Bronislaw Falborski

## [Santiago Alvarez](#)

During World War Two “the Germans” are not only claimed to have murdered millions in stationary gas chambers, but they are also said to have used mobile gas chambers for their evil ends: the infamous “gas vans.” Orthodox holocaust historian Gerald Fleming has reproduced a photograph of a derelict van found in Poland, and he added a caption to it reading: “Gas van used to liquidate Jews at the Kulmhof (Chelmno) extermination camp and near Konitz.” He gave no specific source for this photo, though.<sup>[1]</sup>

The nature of the vehicle in Fleming’s photo was revealed only in 1995, when Jerzy Halbersztadt, at that time director of the Polish Program of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, posted the following text to the newsgroup Holocaust:<sup>[2]</sup>

*“The commission received the information that in the town KOLO (ca. 12 km from Chelmno) in the former factory of Ostrowski there was a van which, according to the witnesses, was used in the death center at Chelmno. The van was found, photographed and researched.*

*The photos taken then are available in the Main Commission’s Archives in Warsaw (signatures 47398, 47396, 47397, 47399; the best one is 47398). The captions of these photographs are till today: ‘a car for killing people by the exhaust fumes at Chelmno’. One of these photos was reproduced in the (sic) Fleming’s book Hitler and the Final Solution with the information that it is a photograph of a ‘gaswagon’ used in Chelmno.*

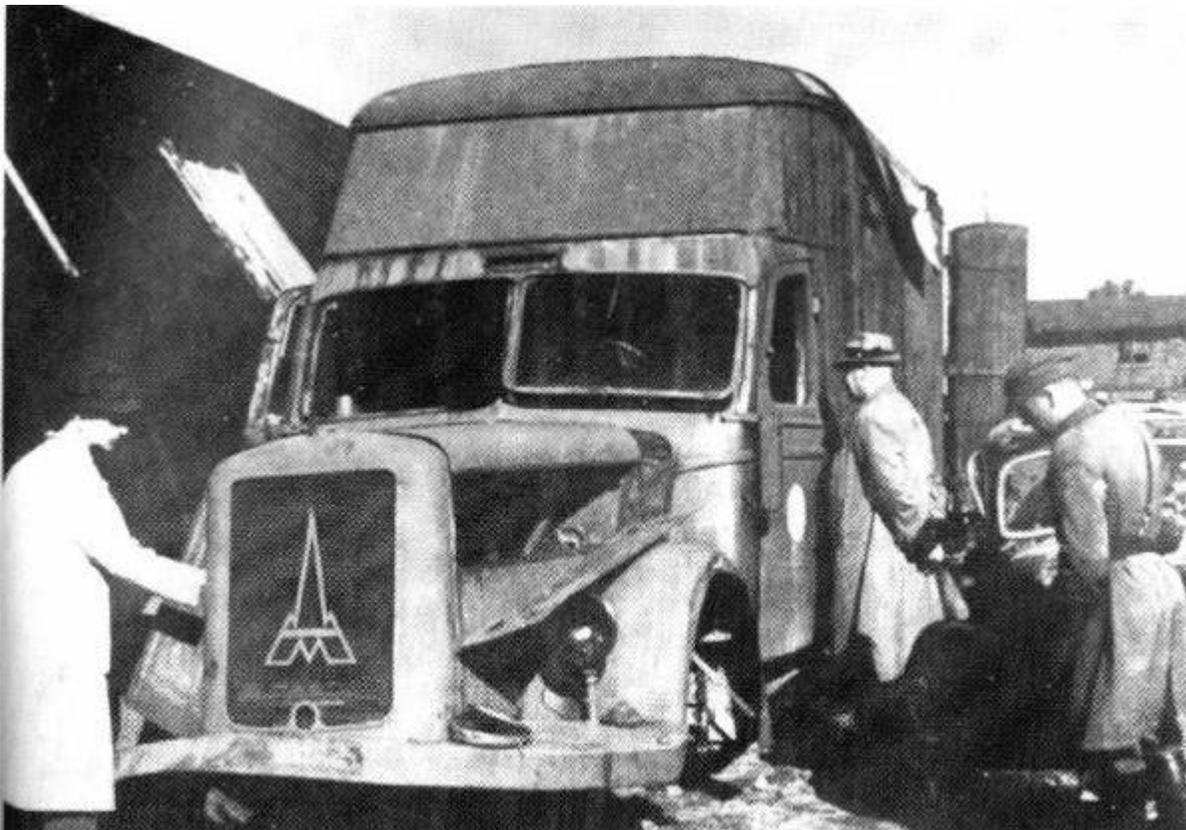
*Despite of (sic) their captions, the photographs do not show the gas van used in the Chelmno death camp. It is clear from the testimonies of Polish witnesses kept in the same archives of the Main Commission (collection ‘Ob’, file 271 and others). [...] The inspection of the van in Ostrowski factory, done on 13 November 1945 by the judge J. Bronowski, did not confirm the existence of any elements of system of gassing of the van’s closed platform. The witnesses called this van ‘a pantehnicon van’ (a van to transport furniture). [...] Under this paint the inscription was seen on the door of the cab: ‘Otto Koehn Spedition<sup>[3]</sup> Ruf 516 Zeulen.....da i.TH’. [...] In 1945 the [Polish] prosecutors came to the conclusion that this van was not a gas van of Chelmno. [...] Thus, there is no reliable graphic illustration of the gas vans used in Chelmno.”*

That could be the end of the story, but it isn’t. Before the van was actually investigated, the Polish judiciary collected witness testimonies about the alleged gas vans of Chelmno. In this context, Wladyslaw Bednarz, an Investigating Judge at the Lodz District Court in Poland, interrogated the Polish mechanic Bronislaw Falborski on 11 June 1945, who stated the following:<sup>[4]</sup>

*“During the German occupation I worked as a mechanic for the German company ‘KRAFT’ in Kolo, Asnyk Street. [...] Our company repaired vehicles of the SS Sonderkommando from Culmhof. Once I was ordered to repair a vehicle which served to poison with gases. [...] I was entrusted with the repair. It consisted of replacing a part between the elastic part of the exhaust pipe and the part which led into the vehicle’s interior. I clarify that the exhaust pipe did not consist of one piece as in normal vehicles, but of three parts, where the middle part was elastic like a hose. Said middle part could either be connected to a pipe located in the floor of the vehicle—with the result that the exhaust gases flowed into the vehicle’s interior—or to the rear part of the exhaust pipe; in that case the exhaust gases flowed into the open like*

*with a normal vehicle. [...] In that period of time I frequently saw vehicles driving into the Chelmno forest and back. These were vehicles like those which I repaired later on in the 'Kraft' workshop. [...] Three times I saw a converted moving truck van which is currently in the courtyard of the former 'Ostrowski' company. Once I had already seen this vehicle in the forest, the second time on the road and the third time when it was just coming out of the courtyard of the Chelmno castle. [...] I saw this vehicle repeatedly with a gap of several days. Recently I saw this truck in the courtyard of the Ostrowski factory, and I am absolutely certain that it is the same vehicle (size—shape—color)."*

Bronislaw Falborski in Lanzmann's movie *Shoah* (1985) This is a very important account, because it firmly and securely links the gas-van claims of Chelmno with the moving truck found in the courtyard of the former "Ostrowski" company. But since the Polish investigation commission several months later came to the conclusion that this truck had indeed been nothing else but an innocuous moving truck, it can therefore be stated with certainty that the witness Bronislaw Falborski saw nothing but harmless moving trucks, and that the repairs he performed were made on just as harmless a vehicle.



*This photo is of a vehicle alleged to be a gas van from the Chelmno Concentration Camp. It is asserted to have been taken prior to 1945.*

*By original uploader in the Russian Wikipedia was Zac Allan, and then Jaro.p (Gas Van, in [www.einsatzgruppenarchives.com](http://www.einsatzgruppenarchives.com)) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons*

How, then, can it be that he claims to have made repairs on an exhaust system of this truck with homicidal features which did not exist? The answer to this question lies hidden in the witness's

testimony. If we carefully analyze what he tells us about the exhaust system he claims to have repaired, it turns out to be nonsensical:

a) Large trucks do not have tail pipes reaching all the way to the end of their cargo compartment. Their exhaust pipes exit either overhead of the driver's cabin or on the left side behind the driver's cabin. The reason for this is that the engines of such trucks are always in front of or underneath the driver's cabin, and adding five meters or more of exhaust pipe to reach the truck's end would be a waste of material and would be trouble-prone.

b) There is no other witness testimony confirming the complicated nature of the system as described by Falborski.

c) The witness contradicts himself. First he says that the exhaust system allegedly used to perform homicides consisted of three parts: the fixed front part of the exhaust pipe, a fixed part leading into the cargo box, and a flexible part connecting the two ("that the exhaust pipe [...] consist[ed...] of three parts"). This is logical. But then he claims that there was another, fourth part between the flexible middle piece and the pipe penetrating the cargo box's floor: "the middle part of the pipe was connected with the interior of the vehicle, but the part between these two parts was worn." From a drawing he added it can be derived that this part was a massive flange. Using a flange rather than a clamp to attach the flexible hose to the pipe was an awkward solution, as any change from "gassing" to normal operation and *vice versa*, would have necessitated the opening of the flange, which was a rather laborious procedure. Hence such a piece is nonsensical and most certainly never existed, even if the rest of his story were true. The witness just made it up in order to have something to replace, that is to say, to be able to make up a tall tale.

In summary, it is clear that this witness statement was meant to corroborate the intended claim by the Polish Investigative Commission that the moving truck found by them in the courtyard of the former "Ostrowski" company had been a homicidal "gas van." It is fortunate that at the end of the day this Commission and the Polish prosecutor were honest enough to admit that this truck never served any homicidal purposes. However, by so doing they proved that witness testimonies given in front of judges or prosecutors in Stalinist postwar Poland did not always tell what they knew but rather what they were told to "know."

Falborski also featured in Claude Lanzmann's movie *Shoah* (1985), where he related the following story from hearsay:[\[5\]](#)

*"Once a van skidded on a curve. Half an hour later, I arrived at the hut of a forest warden named Sendjak. He told me: 'Too bad you were late. You could have seen a van that skidded. The rear of the van opened, and the Jews fell out on the road. They were still alive. Seeing those Jews crawling, a Gestapo man took out his revolver and shot them. He finished them all off. Then they brought Jews who were working in the woods. They righted the van, and put the bodies back inside.'"*

Stories from hearsay related some forty years after the alleged event are notoriously unreliable. In order to prove this, let's imagine this scene. According to orthodox historiography, between fifty and one hundred people were crammed into these trucks. The truck was operated by one or two men, and it was only occasionally accompanied by a car with one or two more German officials. So let's assume in this case we had "only" fifty victims plus a car as an escort. The truck skidded and turned over. The doors

burst open, and fifty Jews came tumbling out still alive. Four German guards now faced fifty Jews somewhere in a forest. One of the Germans decided to shoot them all. So he pulled out his Walther P38, the German standard army pistol (an automatic, not a revolver)—which was carried only by officers, not by soldiers in the ranks. This weapon holds up to eight rounds in its removable magazine.<sup>[6]</sup> Since the Germans most certainly did not send four officers on this gassing tour, the one person having a pistol could not fall back on the other Germans' ammunition. Hence, if assuming that this German officer needed only one bullet for each victim—a conservative assumption—then this German fiend had to reload his pistol (50÷8) seven times. It is neither likely that he carried seven full magazines in his pocket, nor is it likely that he had 42 loose rounds. So how did he get the ammunition needed? And while shooting the first Jew, what was the reaction of the other 49 Jews? Would they each have patiently waited for their turn? And after he had emptied his first magazine and was trying to reload his pistol or radioed to his head office for support and more ammunition, what were the remaining 42 Jews doing? Sitting down and waiting?

Hence we have caught Falborski lying twice. It seems that each time he talks about the “gas vans,” he is lying.

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#### Notes:

- [1] Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984, after p. 92.
- [2] <http://dss.ucsd.edu/~lzamosc/chelm00.htm>; response to an inquiry by Leon Zamosc, UC San Diego, 11 Oct. 1995.
- [3] *Möbelspedition* is the German term for a moving company.
- [4] A copy of the Polish original and a German translation are in the German Federal Archives, Ludwigsburg branch, ref. ZStL 203 AR-Z 69/59, special binder A.
- [5] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfFAH3BA04> and [R6nvodrL7Qo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6nvodrL7Qo); Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah*, Le Livre de Poche, 1985; witness statement quoted from the movie transcript at [www.script-o-rama.com/movie\\_scripts/s/shoah-script-transcript-holocaust.html](http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/s/shoah-script-transcript-holocaust.html).
- [6] [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walther\\_P38](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walther_P38)

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